To: Minter, Douglas[Minter.Douglas@epa.gov]; Boomgaard, Craig[Boomgaard.Craig@epa.gov]; Cantor, Howard[cantor.howard@epa.gov]; Hoskie, Sadie[Hoskie.Sadie@epa.gov]; Watchman-Moore, Derrith[Watchman-Moore.Derrith@epa.gov]; Chin, Lucita[Chin.Lucita@epa.gov]
Cc: Smith, Paula[Smith.Paula@epa.gov]; McClain-Vanderpool, Lisa[Mcclain-Vanderpool.Lisa@epa.gov]
From: Mylott, Richard
Sent: Tue 3/12/2013 7:15:59 PM
Subject: Casper Star Tribune: Water must be preserved for Wyoming's future

Water must be preserved for Wyoming's future

darrell.ehrlick@trib.com

(0) Comments

Oil and water — two things Wyoming can't live without.

These are two things that have shaped the history of Wyoming and will continue to shape its future.

So what does the state do when those two things come into conflict?

That's just the sort of tension that's existed in the controversy about the Pavillion-area drinking water. And, now it's at the heart of whether Encana Gas and Oil can pump water from its operations into the Madison geological formation, about 60 miles west of Casper.

The state's Department of Environmental Quality has already submitted a letter opposing the project, noting that while the water is not used or even very feasible by today's standards, it might be water needed for the future.

With a growing demand for water, especially in the Rocky Mountain West, finding usable water is indeed precious and no small challenge.

That's really at the heart of the issue.

Encana claims the water is twice the recommended limit for dissolved minerals in drinking water. The company says the water also contains a cocktail of arsenic, radium, lead and mercury, making it undrinkable.

Meanwhile, the DEQ also says that the Madison formation is part of a system that furnishes water to many towns and cities. Contamination in one part of the formation could mean literally poisoning the water hole.

That's why we believe stopping this particular Encana project, though there might be a very real economic impact, is not only essential for the Wyoming of today, but also the Wyoming of the future.

While the water from this particular area is miles from cities and towns which would use it, today's technologies and needs aren't the needs of the Wyoming in the future. It may someday be feasible — or necessary — to transport that water. Moreover, purification and filtration also might mean that water with more dissolved solids can be treated economically in the future at these levels. We simply don't know. How many people in 1973 — 40 years ago — could have imagined surfing the Internet on a mobile phone? Times, technologies and needs change.

But even if you believe there will never be a time when that water will be needed, then residents should be concerned for the water they already have.

The Madison formation provides water to many communities. It stretches into Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Wyoming and much of western South Dakota, including Rapid City and Spearfish which are dependent on it for drinking water.

The problem is that geologists and Encana can't say for certain that pumping well water in a remote part of Wyoming won't contaminate drinking water for large numbers of people — some of whom may not even live in this state.

Because of the risk and potential for great harm, the state of Wyoming should really have no other option than to deny this permit. It's just too big of a risk with no guarantees. And, if something goes wrong, what's the back-up plan? How do we just find more water for affected communities in the dry West? Or how do we start treating water that has been polluted?

We hope there is another way for Encana to proceed without having to pump water into the Madison formation. But even if there's not, this could be a potential health threat and public safety concern.

We applaud the DEQ for raising this serious concern and watching out for what could shift from being a discussion about natural resources to a conversation about an environmental disaster.